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ABSTRACT

To attain global and personal health, modern people must learn modern techniques and rituals that enable them to think, feel, and act in concert with nature's ways. In nature and outdoor education, the individual must acknowledge senses and feelings as facts. Over 53 pervasive senses of, by, and from nature have been identified. Some of those senses are hunger, thirst, compassion, place, nurturing, color, community, space, sex, and language. These senses connect us with nature. We tend to devalue nature's sensory gifts to the point that we don't recognize their contribution to our personal lives. We see senses as uncivilized, subjective, and immaterial. Our natural senses regulate and balance our systems; however, our indoor upbringing separates us from nature. When devoid of suppressed balancing signals from our many natural senses, we become cultural objects, programmed soldiers of our civilization's unchecked conquest of nature. We excessively violate ourselves, each other, and nature to obtain band-aids for our injured senses. Some ways leaders and counselors can connect themselves and others with nature are by: (1) acknowledging that our deeper feelings are a shared experience with the natural world; (2) labeling sensations and feelings by calling them nature; (3) helping people directly re-connect their senses to nature's ways; and (4) offering guided, unmediated contact with nature for education and stress management. (KS)

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CONNECT WITH NATURE: REGENERATE PERSONAL AND GLOBAL BALANCE

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Abstract

In its pristine state, the natural world approaches perfection within and about us. It survives and grows through 53 pervasive senses of, by and from Nature. The interconnections and parameters of these natural senses creates Nature's diversity, wisdom and balance. Acting in congress, they make sense. However, our disruptive Western upbringing creates problems. Unlike upbringing in more peaceful unpolluted cultures, it excessively separates us from Nature. As it emphasizes artificial living and abstract reasoning, it painfully disconnects our natural senses from the natural world. This stresses and deteriorates Nature's self-regulating harmony internally and environmentally. Runaway personal, social and environmental problems result. New, unique activities which scientifically enable our reasoning to let the natural world rejuvenate its injured senses, regenerate balance.

* * * * *

"The senses, being the explorers of the world, open the way to knowledge."
- Maria Montessori

Dramatically, scientifically, outdoor education has given birth to an environmentally sound breakthrough. A new sensory technology has shown to catalyze personal and global balance by inextricably connecting modern consciousness to its roots in Nature. The technique is used in natural places: wilderness, backyards, even terrariums, anywhere one can sense Nature's attractions. There, it creates a teachable moment in which Nature touches us multisensually. Ensuing thoughts, feelings and reactions trigger discussion, sharing, and analysis. The technique awakens and strengthens natural feelings. It therapeutically connects Nature within and without, reducing our strained relationships with the natural world(Cohen, 1989). It is a unique contribution to personal and global sanity.

For decades, psychologists have scientifically demonstrated that environments shape our perceptions of reality (Cohen, 1988 chap. 1). For example, when simultaneously placing each of our hands in very hot and very cold environments for a minute, and then plunging both hands into a basin of lukewarm water, the lukewarm water feels hot to the cold hand and cold to the hot hand. Similarly, modern people, on average, spend over 95% of their time indoors. Our artificial environment's extreme separation from the natural world powerfully shapes our perceptions of Nature. This breeds disastrous environmental and social problems.(Cohen, 1986, chap. 18).

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They're seldom found in indigenous societies which culturally and physically live close to Nature. (Cohen, 1988 P.177-180) (Farb, 1968 Chap. 2.)

Nature as Teacher

As an independent investigator and educator, for the past thirty years I, along with my consensus-governed student groups, have lived and studied exclusively outdoors throughout the seasons (Cohen, 1988 PP 56-59). Over time, I discovered how to let Nature itself teach us its balanced workings.(Cohen 1988, Chapter 3). Slowly, our extensive explorations in natural areas encouraged us to emulate Nature. We began to perceive and relate in its stable, utopian ways. I found that to know Nature as Nature knows itself enables one to enjoy Nature's power and peace. (Frank, 1966).

In order to survive, my outdoor learning groups developed an eclectic scientific process. We discovered that to effectively establish contact with Nature and its wisdom, *we had to acknowledge senses and feelings as facts*. Although feelings are usually scientifically taboo, we recognized their omnipresence in us as a reliable, repeatable truth. "I feel therefore I am" became as important as "I think therefore I am" when we considered what we might be if we didn't have any senses or feelings. We observed that when we excluded our feelings, our groups developed major problems and excessive stress(Cohen, 1985 pp 7-102). We concluded that scientifically observing the world while disregarding senses and feelings, was like watching television with the sound turned off and believing you fully understood the programs.

Thinking Like Nature

The natural world is a global life community. When free of our hurtful cultural practices, it approaches perfection. As it organizes, preserves, balances and regenerates itself, Earth creates an optimum of life and diversity. As if by magic, it does this without producing garbage, pollution, or war; insanity, excessive stress or violence(Young,1986. chap. 79). Our relationship to the natural world is like our leg's relationship to our body. With the exception of our destructive cultural tendencies, we are each a seamless continuum of Nature. (Samuels, 1983)

Gregory Bateson identified the modern world's greatest challenge. He noted that our personal, social and environmental problems result from the difference between how Nature works and the way people think. I've found that to think like Nature, *it is logical to trust our unmediated experiences in Nature*. Words and concepts mediate Nature's workings. For example, words tell us we experience and learn from five senses: *touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing*. However, I and others find that, we inherit not five, *but over 53 pervasive senses of, by and from Nature*.(Murchie 1978 P. 177-181) But, don't believe us. Instead, trust your unmediated experiences. That's the turning point. Unmediated experiences are vital facts, data and evidence. Do you or don't you sense or feel *hunger? thirst? compassion? place? nurturing? color? community? space? sex? language? gravity? form? motion*? By including the five senses we already acknowledge, this totals 18 senses. And if what I'm saying disturbs you, so much the better. Your disturbance is a feeling. It indicates that your sense of reason is alive, and challenged. That makes 19 senses we've identified. There are a minimum of 34 more, including *electromagnetism, direction, season, hormonal, distance, self, fatigue, trust and belonging to a larger whole*. Nature does not use a spoken or written language to communicate or intercommunicate. Sensitivity to natural senses is how Nature works. Senses were "invented" by Nature, not people. To gain Nature's intelligent balance, it is reasonable to trust and strengthen our natural senses.

Each of the 53 senses arises as part of Nature's diversification. For example, an organism living in the sea has little need for being attracted to water. But, as a land animal evolves, a vital survival sense similar to thirst must simultaneously evolve to keep the land organism connected to water and vice verse. Although we don't know how other organisms experience senses, we do know that we sense them as feelings.

Connecting With Nature

Natural senses connect us with Nature; thirst to water, hunger to food, respiration to air, and

community to our immediate surroundings. Reasoning and language(symbolizing) are but two of 53 natural connecting senses. They are not our only, nor most objective way of knowing, nor does the natural world culture or depend upon them as we do.

The natural world is a life system, a community of organic and inorganic parts. In order for the global life system, or any system, to function, each of the system's parts must connect with the system in some way. Any part or particle that isn't somehow in communication with a system can't be part of it. It can't coordinate its activities with it.

People are part of the global life system. We must be in communication with it. How? Like all else in Nature. Through natural senses.

The natural world flows through us and vice-versa. Through microorganism-mineral connective senses, every few years over 95% of our body is replaced molecule by molecule, atom by atom, by new molecules and atoms from our surroundings. Not too many, not too few, just the right amount for our lives to flourish and global life to continue flowing. Every seven years or so the environment completely replaces us. It becomes us, we become it (Murchie p.321). Natural senses, not books, telephones or human intelligence, catalyze this life giving flow. Using natural senses alone, over 3 billion years ago microorganisms intelligently "invented" immensely complex processes such as photosynthesis, respiration, and fermentation; genetics, the atmosphere and our living Planet(Margulus 1986, Introduction). We might define death as a time or place when some natural senses and the flow stop, when we become the environment permanently.

Balancing The Flow

Recently, disbelief shook a conference of educators when I said "We devalue Nature's sensory gifts to the point that we don't recognize their contribution to our personal lives." To demonstrate this, I asked an elementary question. There was dead silence. Seconds ticked by like hours. The moment frightened me. Perhaps they would be angry. After all, every soul in that room knew the answer to my simple question. You may be speechless too, when I pose my question to you a paragraph from now. Yet you, too, will know its answer.

People are part of Earth's flow of water. As it does in all organisms, water from the environment flows into us, through us and out of us. But, during this process, neither an excess nor shortage of water enters or leaves us. We neither bloat nor dehydrate. Obviously, a sensitive regulator guides and balances water through us.

So now let me ask you that simple question: *How does our body know to intake, regulate and balance water?* Are you now quiet too?

The water regulator you know best is a sensation or feeling called *thirst*. Surprised? Don't be. Most people can't bring to mind this sense, or other natural senses because our upbringing demeans senses and feelings rather than culturing them. We do this because long ago, our tropical ancestors discovered that by using their cerebral cortex senses of language and reason (Bob Samples, personal communication, October, 1987), they could creatively survive anywhere. Authoritarianly, these two senses could conceive and technologically convert natural habitats into artificial, tropic-simulating environments, free from Nature's fluctuations. Survival became suppressing the other natural senses, or intensely programming them to respond to abstract artificial reasoning(Cohen, 1988 chap. 9). Today, this acculturating process continues. For example, we are legally required to spend 18,000 childhood hours indoors using "the 3 R's" in order to become respected citizens. Unlike more balanced societies, today we disown many natural senses because we believe that:

-*natural senses are the uncivilized ways of our enemy*. Nature, not people, created senses and feelings, and we know Nature as a villain to be conquered, not extolled. We excessively bomb, bulldoze, annihilate, maim, poison, capture, cut, exploit and destroy the natural world, condoning this process as survival, improvement and progress. In our language-governed society, words are our destiny. Think of all the "dirty" words you know. Note that they describe Nature. And "Villain" means "countryside inhabitant", "heathen" means "bog inhabitant". Note that Satan, the biblical explanation for our problems, is Nature; he has fur,

horns, claws, scales, forked hoofs and a tail; he's seldom a white man. We negate natural senses like we negate other nature-connected beings including indigenous cultures, people of color, minorities, women, and children. As shown by our deteriorating environments and annihilation of species, we treat Nature like hitting a pretty girl in the face with a shovel (Cohen, 1983).

-senses are subjective and immediate. Each of us may experience senses somewhat differently and for varying durations.

-senses interfere with our God-given dominion of the world (Genesis 1:28). We don't control senses. Like thirst or suffocation, senses control us. To survive, we must meet their demands.

-senses are not materials. To our materialistic outlooks they are immaterial. Senses are not matter, so they don't matter. These word similarities are not coincidental.

For these reasons, we don't validate natural senses. Instead, we subvert them by ignoring them or by "toilet training" and similarly conditioning them to our indoor customs and technologies (Frank, 1966). Out of habit, we place more trust in things like a modern plastic nursing bottle full of chemicals, than we do in the living Earth's time-tested, balanced breast of life.

The Fabric of Balance

The sense of thirst's balancing of water within us exemplifies each of the 52 other senses' balancing of our lives. Each sense participates in Nature's governance. We're seldom aware that by activating or deactivating like control valves, natural senses regulate. For example, thirst not only motivates us to drink the Planet's water, but quenched thirst feelings tell us when to stop drinking. That sensory change is an essence of Nature's self-regulation. We are as one with Nature. When we feel varying intensities of thirst, or any other natural feeling, we are actually sensing the natural world nurturing and balancing itself in and through us. We seldom validate that our deeper feelings are shared with Earth, that thirst is as much a part of water and its flow as is wetness.

In concert, Nature's many senses create a global symphony as they touch and modify each other. For example, salinity (*chemical senses*), heat (*temperature senses*), *seeing*, *touching* or *hearing* water, and exhaustion (*fatigue senses*) affect the intensity and frequency of thirst. Similarly, through brain wave studies, researchers confirm that each of our daily adult thoughts and acts originate in, and can be modified by, deeper, old brain natural senses and feelings(Shevrin, 1980). However, our extreme indoor upbringing -including our constantly reinforced artificial values and abstractions- program our consciousness. They bury in our subconscious the global survival wisdom of our old brain Nature connections. Without this wisdom, our adult awareness and reasoning separate from Nature within and without. We exist devoid of Nature's enchantment. It haunts our dreams.

In youngsters, the old brain, yet unadulterated, connects children's consciousness to Nature. Children don't take lessons teaching them to love Bambi. They are born with that love. But when it's re-focused, devalued or injured, it deteriorates. Oh, how our culturally biased thinking detests this truth.

We not only demean natural senses, we also demean Nature's use of them to make sense. Astonishment crosses the faces of people in my workshops as they discover that the closest wilderness to them lies within them. Biologically, emotionally, we consist of wilderness relationships and values. In us are elements of the whale's intelligence, the coyote's persistence and the redwood's endurance. Each of our traits, -tool use, technologies, kindness, sensitivity, language, law, justice, honesty, courage, loyalty- also exist in Nature (Krutch, 1954 chap. 5). Yet, unlike more environmentally responsible societies, we seldom honor wild beings for their innate sense or their vital contributions to our being (Cohen, 1991). It becomes easy to unethically, guiltlessly exploit them.

At One With Nature

We and our living Planet identically operate through a congress of senses, a consensus or common sense which our society tends to demean as wild, spiritual, subjective or psychological. But, as Henry David Thoreau noted: "What we call wilderness is a civilization other than our own." Too often, we forget that the natural world's congress of senses is intelligent(Cohen 1989, p.17). In exactly the same way that it intelligently knows how to heal an injured landscape, it knows how to heal our cuts, burns and emotional wounds. For this reason, outdoor and holistic therapies often succeed where other therapies fail.

To live reasonably and responsibly, we must learn to commune with the natural world in its language, for it won't learn to speak English. How much better all lives might be today if Earth's wise, balancing interplay of senses helped regulate our stressed runaway lives. Imagine the world if we were brought up validating and intensifying natural senses like *belonging to a greater whole, outdoor aesthetics, community, place, compassion, self and nurturing* as strongly as we experience *thirst, sight and language*. For example, we demean Nature by applying the label of "conflict resolution" to social relationships that evoke these natural senses, consensus and common sense. Scientifically, conflict resolution should be known as "awakening Nature within." Win-win solutions are actually awakenings of the *natural sense of belonging to a greater whole*. Another example: Hidden under the label of "instinct," natural senses control and balance a beaver's technological house and dam building efforts as well as its environmental relationships and number of offspring. Still another example: Humus, whose name we share (human) consists of hundreds of diverse, yet balanced, species and elements. An unadulterated teaspoon of humus contains five million bacteria, twenty million fungi, one million protozoa, two hundred thousand algae and billions of mineral molecules, all living in unpolluted, illiterate harmony (Crowfoot 1986 p. 20-1 - 20-6). Natural senses balance people(s) that culture them, too(Turnbull, 1950). Their strong sensations and rituals make social or environmental irresponsibility feel like a criminal, irreverent act. But devoid of suppressed balancing signals from our many natural senses, modern people become cultural objects, programmed soldiers of our civilization's unchecked conquest of Nature.

The Ravages Of Sensual Illiteracy

Our upbringing rips us from the natural world (Cohen, 1988 chap. 10). Every crying or unhappy child is reacting to a painful injury to one or more of its natural senses. Hurtfully, our childhood rips our natural senses from the natural world. It lets them die, or re-bonds their torn raw ends to modern technologies and their questionable effects, or to conflicting geographic, technologic, or ideologic belief systems. Our runaway emotional and substance dependencies - including dependencies on drugs, alcohol, and hurtful people; money, oil, food and forest- result from our attempts to sooth our severance pain. Addictively, abusively, we excessively violate ourselves, each other and Nature not so much for survival, but to obtain band-aids for our injured senses. The greater our pain, the greater are our fears and willingness to accept stupid, destructive or unstable relationships. We end up doing to Nature as was done to our Nature.

Like insane zombies, unlike other species, we guide our daily lives mostly using only four senses: sight, sound, reason and language. Our abstract way of knowing is dangerously thin. One inaccurate word or concept can lead us to harm; language barriers separate individuals and nations.

Our biggest problem, greed, stems from our separation from many healthy natural feelings that were hurt during childhood. When we injure, deprive, or withdraw senses and feelings, we want. When we want, there is never enough.

Over and over again history shows that we can't successfully live by abstract reasoning alone. The polluted, violent, excessive aspects of our society are senseless. They are nonsense because they are disconnected from Nature's wise, guiding congress of senses. They are insane because they are emotionally out of balance. You show me people with problems, and I'll show you people with injured natural senses.

Reconnecting For Balance:

Survival is an emotion, an expression of the universal desire to be.(Cohen, 1988 p.125)

Societies respecting Nature reinforce their citizen's inborn survival feelings. By bonding their children to Nature's harmonic workings, they rarely create the destructive problems of modern life(Farb 1968 Chap. 2). Such people tell me they govern themselves by sensations, by "thinking with their heart." This obviously works. They, environmentally and socially, have lived in balance for thousands of years. Intelligently, sensitively, feelingfully they hold the natural world in awe and in common. This guides and unifies them. They respect habitats as sacred, species and minerals as cherished relatives(Cohen, 1984. p. 212). My outdoor group experiences show me that when modern people embrace Nature, they too learn to intensely feel and cooperate. They too evolve a common sense that reveres being and all beings. As William Shakespeare observed: "One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin."

Any responsible person can help people connect with Nature by increasing people's connectedness with natural senses. We're part of the problem when we don't recognize modern stress as our inner Nature's reactions to attacks by our culture's excessive nature-conquering expectations. I suggest that leaders and counselors connect themselves and others with Nature as follows:

Acknowledge that our deeper feelings are a shared experience with the natural world.

Scientifically define and label sensations and feelings by calling them Nature. For example, identify uncomfortable feelings(anger, fear, depression, anxiety) as "Nature within us experiencing abandonment." Identify comfortable feelings as "Nature within us experiencing s upport." The "inner child" is "Nature within" or "our inner Nature."

Help people directly re-connect their senses to Nature's ways rather than to questionable cultural practices. Ground people in the survival power and wisdom of the global life community, rather than in the artificially competitive, exploitive frailties of modern politics, economics, and education.

Offer guided, unmediated contact with Nature as a means for education and stress management.

Learn to differentiate our natural senses from our acculturated(socially conditioned) feelings.

Acknowledge that in an insane society, a person can't act sanely without experiencing risk.

Recognize that motivation from how one feels, not information alone, changes behavior.

Evaluate thoughts feelings and actions by their long term effects on Nature within and without.

Antidotes

To attain global and personal health, modern people must learn modern techniques and rituals that enable us to think, feel and act in concert with Nature's ways. Over the years outdoors, I've found teachable experiences that accomplish this. Anybody can use them. They are simple, short outdoor activities done in any vegetated area. They bond us to the natural world. There, senses safely awaken, regain meaning and re-establish balance (Knapp, 1988).

On Earth Day, 1990, World Peace University in Eugene, Oregon established Project NatureConnect by publishing their *Field Guide to CONNECTING WITH NATURE: Creating Moments That Let Earth Teach.* This national award winning outdoor activity collection, along with its companion volume *HOW NATURE WORKS*, offers hundreds of fun, sensitizing, explorations, ethics, role plays, postures, writings, associations, transferences, projections, analysis, imageries, games, personifications, reinforcements, and writings. They empower modern reasoning and awareness to seek, sense, enjoy, validate, resonate with, appreciate, trust and celebrate Nature's many other senses. *Project Nature Connect* activities therapeutically reduce our costly

severance pain and destructive tendencies. They scientifically enable us to cherish the natural environment and each other because balanced life feels good. (Cohen, 1989).

Potential

The U.S. Army demonstrates the power of multi-sensual education. In a period of four months, its experiential basic training course changes drafted peaceful civilians into aggressive soldiers. Project NatureConnect teaches even more effectively than does the Army. Without coercion, by giving added value to the natural world within and without, experientially, multisensually it educates people to live more harmoniously. It excels because balanced living and Nature's peace provide greater rewards than do violence, exploitation and stress. As environmental educator Bill Hammond notes, connecting with Nature: "Allows the natural world to nurture a responsible growing edge of culture."

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Michael J. Cohen, Ed.D. directs Project NatureConnect. He founded and directed degree granting environmental education outdoor education programs for the National Audubon Society, conceived the International Symposium "Is The Earth A Living Organism?" and presently chairs the Integrated Ecology Department of World Peace University through which multi-sensual Nature training is offered. He is a contributing editor to Between The Species and the national award winning author of CONNECTING WITH NATURE and HOW NATURE WORKS. The latter are available ($$11.00) from the University at Box 1089, Eugene OR 97440